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DEPT FOR G/TIP, NEA/ARP

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM KWMN BA HUMRIT

SUBJECT: ANTI-TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE CHAIRMAN COMMENTS ON PROGRESS COMBATING TRAFFICKING

Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) In a December 7 meeting with Emboffs covering several topics, MFA Assistant Undersecretary for Coordination and Follow Up and Bahrain's Anti-Trafficking Task Force Chairman Shaikh Abdul Aziz Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa discussed GOB steps to combat trafficking-in-persons. He said the November 23 opening of the government-funded shelter was a major achievement to protect trafficking and family violence victims. Poloff noted that he and the Ambassador had attended the opening and toured the shelter, which has medical and legal professionals on its staff for those who need such assistance. The shelter presently has capacity for approximately 80 women and has room to expand as needed.

¶2. (C) Shaikh Abdul Aziz reviewed the steps the GOB has taken to introduce anti-trafficking legislation. He recalled that Ministry of Justice Undersecretary Shaikh Khalid Bin Ali Al Khalifa had consulted with international experts in trafficking-in-persons, including an Italian immigration judge and Dr. Mohamed Mattar of the Protection Project at Johns Hopkins University, while he drafted new legislation in line with international standards. Shaikh Abdul Aziz reminded Emboffs that the legislation has been presented to the Cabinet, and will be presented to the new parliament during its next session, which opens December 15.

¶3. (C) Shaikh Abdul Aziz pointed out that even in the absence of anti-trafficking legislation, the government had prosecuted traffickers under existing labor-related and anti-prostitution legislation. He also said that a Ministry of Justice judicial reform project has increased the government's ability to provide statistics on prosecutions. Shaikh Abdul Aziz mentioned recent visits to Bahrain by UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking Sigma Huda and by IOM director Brunson McKinley, which he said demonstrated the GOB's willingness to face and address the problem of trafficking. He also expressed his expectation that the G/TIP-sponsored IOM training for law enforcement officers and judges in January 2007 would further equip those on the ground to fight trafficking.

¶4. (C) Regarding the G/TIP interim review, Shaikh Abdul Aziz said going to Tier 3 would be an "unfortunate" outcome because there have been genuine efforts that have led to real progress. He speculated that there might be some backlash from those who have been working hard to bring about change. They may become discouraged and question the value of their contribution, saying to themselves that their efforts and Bahrain's progress are not recognized.

¶5. (C) Shaikh Abdul Aziz made note of the attention the United Arab Emirates has received for its recent passage of

trafficking legislation and its plan to host a conference on trafficking in March 2007. He expressed some frustration with the irony that the Emirates, a country without an elected legislature, can enact legislation "with the stroke of a pen." Shaikh Abdul Aziz said, "We started first, but the UAE has passed us," referring to the fact that Bahrain drafted anti-trafficking legislation first and shared it with other GCC countries as a model.

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